

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

MEMORIAL

OF

THE CORPORATION OF WASHINGTON.

JANUARY 19, 1833.

Referred to the Committee for the District of Columbia.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled:

The memorial of the Corporation of Washington most respectfully represents:

That your memorialists, acting by the undersigned committee, have to petition for assistance from the paternal authority of your honorable bodies, to the many pecuniary difficulties which, notwithstanding the great efforts of the Corporation of Washington, continue to embarrass its operations.

In making this appeal to the liberality of Congress, they have to acknowledge, with a most grateful spirit, the manifold favors which have been heretofore so benevolently tendered them, and hope that your honorable bodies will find some excuse for the multiplication of their demands, in the fact, that the City of Washington was, but a few years ago, a solitary wilderness; that the great father of public liberty, whose name it bears, in modelling the plan of a federal city which should do honor to the Union, necessarily laid off its streets and avenues on the most extensive and expensive scale.

That these public highways of immense width and length were, with a few exceptions, all graduated, improved, and repaired out of the revenue of the Corporation; and that this infant city, so recently located, surveyed, and settled, furnished but poor and barren resources for the completion of such vast ornamental avenues.

Buildings in a city but just founded were of course but few, and of no great value; and, consequently, your memorialists had, for a number of years, to struggle on with the heavy charges accruing from the opening of such avenues, (the cost of which, to the present time, is over \$600,000,) having nothing of any consequence but the waste and unimproved lots to assess for the providing of a revenue. Your memorialists therefore trust that your honorable bodies will not be insensible to the great disadvantages under which they have labored in having had to meet the expense of making a new city.

They had no street or avenue opened and graduated, but nearly all to do, at their cost, for the accommodation of the public. And besides this, the expense of making wells, conveying water, making pavements, and many other incidental charges, were to be assumed by your memorialists.

Leaving these simple suggestions to the more minute consideration of your honorable bodies, your memorialists must now solicit your attention to the picture which, they regret to say, the financial condition of the city exhibits. In the first place, your memorialists have to remark that, under their charter of 1812, as well as 1820, they were invested by your honorable bodies with authority to raise by lottery a certain amount, to be applied to certain specified objects; that, in endeavoring to realize this amount, they contracted with an individual for the drawing of several of the schemes of a lottery, and when, in the full tide of prosperity, a sudden and surprising reversion in their affairs was occasioned by the unfortunate issue of this contract; that the debt arising from this transaction already exceeds \$175,000, with considerable more yet in litigation. From this disappointment in realizing the beneficent view of Congress, they have been loaded with a debt for which no value has been received, notwithstanding the charter expressly provided that they were to raise \$10,000 per annum, clear of all expenses.

This single misfortune has seriously blighted the flourishing condition of your memorialists, and growing out of an event that was not to be anticipated, no charge of folly or culpability on their part can interpose to deaden the sympathies which must exist in your august bodies towards our suffering from this unforeseen calamity.

Your memorialists beg further to represent, that another source of unexpected embarrassment has originated in their subscription to the Chesapeake and Ohio canal; that, in 1827, when the whole country was enjoying uninterrupted prosperity, this work, which, when completed, was so well calculated to advance the interests of this city, and give to it the facilities of commercial enterprise, engaged the most zealous efforts of your memorialists. Believing it to be a measure of national importance, the tendency of which was to unite in indissoluble bonds the union of the States, and regarding it at the same time as opening new channels of trade to the people of this city with their western brethren, and fondly cherishing that spirit of public good which the sacred character of the illustrious father of the country had impressed in recommending the improvement of the navigation of the Potomac river, your memorialists undertook to pay towards this work, one million of dollars. At the time of its subscription, they sincerely believed that, in a few years, should no obstacle occur to the execution of the work, the stock of the company would be worth more than its original cost. In order to provide the sum requisite to discharge this subscription, your memorialists employed a distinguished individual to proceed to Europe to negotiate a loan. This loan was effected, but upon terms which made it nett less than \$850,000 out of a million. Part of it was detained to pay the interest on the amount loaned; so that your memorialists, from these and other causes, have a deficit in the sum requisite to pay their subscription, of \$250,000. Had not unexpected impediments been thrown in the way of the prosecution of the work, your memorialists yet believe that it would have been completed to the coal banks, which would impart to the stock additional value. This, however, was defeated, by an injunction issuing from the high court of chancery in the State of Maryland, where the controversy was kept in suspense for several years. The difficulty is at length terminated, and

could your memorialists contribute their part of the subscription, they confidently believe that this work, in which the Government is concerned to the same amount, would teem with the most prolific benefits to the welfare of the Union and the prosperity of this city. In consequence of this delay in the execution of the work, your memorialists have been again visited with disappointment in the fruition of the hopes which had animated them in engaging in this great measure of internal improvement. No additional commercial prosperity has as yet been the fruit of their labors. All is yet to be accomplished, for your memorialists are persuaded that all must admit the immense benefits which are to flow from the perfection of this work, when they survey the facts upon which the estimation is based. No one can deny that extensive coal pits lie in the neighborhood of Cumberland, as well as boundless forests, productive, not only of fuel, but of valuable timber, lumber for houses, and materials for cabinet-ware of every description. Lime too can be manufactured in the greatest quantities; and, considering the fertility of the soil in the various valleys extending in the States of Virginia and Pennsylvania that are contiguous to this great work, and connecting, as it will, the yet richer country of the Western States, what is there to blast the golden expectations that we have indulged in from the construction of this canal? Can any one doubt, that individual enterprise will fell the forest and gather the timber for the purposes of art, or that the coal banks will be disturbed by the industry of man, should this cheap and facile conveyance be at hand to float the fruits of their public spirit to a sure and advantageous market, or that the farmer will refrain from passing down his extensive crops to the same spot? These are the leading sober and palpable facts which have induced us to embark so largely in this great national improvement. Besides the principal debt which your memorialists have contracted to effect this object, they are saddled with an interest of \$55,000, and have been compelled to raise that amount by imposing the most grievous taxes upon their fellow citizens. The controversy with the Baltimore Railroad Company, in retarding the canal, necessarily put an end to all receipts by way of dividend upon their stock, so that the same fatality has visited your memorialists to prevent any return upon this heavy debt, as operated in the lottery case to deprive us of those benefits which Congress designed to arise in the grant of the power to raise money in that way. With these embarrassments, growing out of repeated misfortunes, and no censurable wrong, what are we to do?

Can we not invoke the aid of a benignant Legislature, which, by the Constitution, is made the sole and exclusive guardian of our wants, to extend to us some aid in this time of distress, and to proffer to us, from the bounties of an overflowing Treasury, the means of relief? Your honorable bodies cannot be indifferent to our condition, when you reflect, that even the happy and prosperous Government under which we live, not only may be, but has been, subjected to pecuniary embarrassments, which were as trying as they were unexpected, and that, in the patriotism and public spirit of the people, it found a sure and wholesome relief, in accommodations of extensive loans.

We are encouraged, too, in thus approaching your honorable bodies for the means of relief, from a few considerations, which, if they be not sufficient to establish a claim upon the Government, yet justify your memorialists in addressing them to the equity and justice of the Legislature.

The amount of public property, comprising real estate and improvements, is nearly equal to the aggregate of the same belonging to individuals, in the City of Washington.

This immense public domain has never contributed a portion of the expense which the citizens have been subjected to in laying out and improving a new and infant city; and the actual profits which the Government has derived from the sale of lots, to the year 1820, is over seven hundred thousand dollars, with a balance remaining unsold, including public squares and improvements, estimated at over four millions. Now, estimating the revenue which the city would have raised from a tax on this property similar to that levied on the citizens, would, for thirty years, at the lowest estimate, be \$30,000 per annum, which, for thirty years of principal, would be nine hundred thousand dollars; so that your memorialists have been excluded from receiving from the public property a sum nearly sufficient to relieve them from their heavy engagements. We beg to be understood as merely urging this consideration in behalf of our necessities upon the equity of the Government; and, in addition to these taxes for municipal purposes, the Government has derived considerable amount of revenue by a tax imposed during the war. Your memorialists are more impressed with the cogency and weight of this consideration, when they reflect that it has operated, at least in one great State, to induce the Legislature to pass an act authorizing the city of New York, in certain cases, to levy a tax upon the property of the State within its jurisdiction, in the following words: "That it shall be lawful for the respective officers and persons having the charge and superintendence of public property in the city of New York, belonging to this State, to pay the sums assessed or to be assessed thereon, or in respect thereto, by or under the authority of the Mayor, Aldermen, and Commonalty of the said city, according to law; and that the Treasurer, on the warrant of the Comptroller, pay to such officers and persons respectively, the sums which they shall respectively so pay on the account aforesaid, due proof being first made of such payment to the satisfaction of the Comptroller." [See page 117, Laws of the State of New York relative to the City of New York, published by authority of said city.] Here, then, is a precedent in the legislation of a great State, which upholds the justice of our appeal, and it may be that many such examples of generous patronage exist in the various enactments of the other States of this Union. Your memorialists, therefore, believing that your honorable bodies entertain for the metropolis of this great Republic the most earnest and anxious regard, and considering the extensive plan of its construction, involving immense cost in its improvement, and being repeatedly baffled in their best efforts to give to it the stimulants of trade and commerce, and finding their burthens greatly multiplied by this, they hope, excusable public spirit, have finally to resort to the protection of their Representatives in Congress assembled, and invoke of them the exercise of a benignant spirit, in such way as may seem meet and proper, so as effectually to relieve their present embarrassments, either in taking this canal stock, or in granting money, or by way of loan.

And your memorialists will ever pray, &c.

JOHN P. VAN NESS,	<i>Mayor.</i>
PETER FORCE,	
C. K. GARDINER,	
C. H. GOLDSBOROUGH,	
JOHNSON HELLEN,	
JOHN CAROTHERS,	
CHAS. F. ELLIS,	

} Committee.